

A photograph of a factory worker in a blue plaid shirt and safety glasses working on a blue machine. The background is a busy industrial setting with various equipment and workers.

A Principle-Driven Culture Pushes Igloo to **SUCCESS**



podcast



Our company's culture of commitment is the cornerstone for everything we do.

BY JEANETTE WINTERS

Iconic brands by their nature are designed to conjure emotions, memories, and—simply put—good feelings. Now that our Igloo brand has reached its 70th anniversary, the ever-evolving family, sports team, and commercial cooler company continues to enhance products and expand reach into growing markets. Despite Igloo's 70 years, we today face continual competitive pressure to up our game.

Igloo Products Corporation is a growing company that includes three brands: Igloo (coolers), Cool Gear (personal hydration), and YEW Stuff (occasional, personalized coolers). These three brands are sold in more than 70 countries. In fact, an Igloo cooler is sold somewhere in the world nearly every 1.6 seconds.

Igloo coolers are made in Katy, Texas, a suburb of Houston, the third-most populous U.S. city. Manufacturing operations include some 900 associates, which is what we call everyone who works at Igloo. These individuals hail from 21 nations and speak more than a dozen languages. Hydration products and occasional coolers are manufactured in Asia, where more than 20 associates reside.

Culture of commitment

Igloo is global, diverse, and growing. We are investing in manufacturing operations and supporting our associates with a training program that includes four primary domains. Based on employee engagement research, we learned that our associates are looking for more training in all four areas: technical (related to manufacturing), personal skill development (presentation skills, building financial acumen, and even English as a second language), teamwork (building greatness through collective efforts, colossal collaboration, effective communication), and our culture of commitment.

The culture of commitment—the management and leadership foundation at Igloo—is the brainchild of the company’s president and CEO, Mark A. Parrish. Throughout his career, he had observed and articulated how success could be won. The resulting manifesto outlined how to enable organizations and their individuals to be successful. Upon his arrival at Igloo in early 2015, he shared the 12 Disciplines of Building Cultures of Commitment, which became the cornerstone constructs of how we would work, individually and collectively. Beginning with his introduction to all associates, he detailed the 12 disciplines along with the expectations they set.

Once the initial introductory phase had been completed, human resources (the keeper of the culture) began offering training programs on what, why, and how to embrace these disciplines to guide our work. From there, strategic planning, annual goal setting, sales meetings, and new-hire training all included introductions to the Igloo culture of commitment.

Personal skill development and teamwork all evolve from how we embrace Igloo’s culture. During orientation, associates begin their journey of familiarization with the 12 disciplines, which, when combined, form the collective principles of the how and why we work here. The 12 principles are grouped into two trenches: the Fundamental Five and the Subsequent Seven.

The Fundamental Five disciplines detail how we work together in a transparent and positive manner:

1. **Give trust to others’ intentions.** Operate with honesty and integrity, be trustworthy, and build positive relationships.
 2. **Suspend judgment of others’ actions.** Understand that your values, beliefs, and behaviors are observed and endured by others. Work to appreciate different perspectives, always respecting differences.
 3. **Use the power of inquiry to promote left-handed conversations.** Allow dialogue fueled by active listening for the purpose of a free-flowing exchange and respect for all ideas.
 4. **Empower providing freedom, but within fences.** Recognize that empowerment is not *carte blanche*, but rather operating with a purpose and within guidelines.
 5. **Address politics, enabling principles to prevail.** At Igloo, politics is the abandonment of principles for position or personal advantage. Our culture is principle-driven; we must maintain political awareness at all times.
- The Subsequent Seven then press further into the practices that support how we operate interpersonally:
6. **Recipe for success.** Training, coaching, counseling, and accountability.
 7. **Crisis management.** Contain, develop short-term and then long-term responses—remembering to communicate at each critical juncture.
 8. **The communications model.** Associates learn to inform, persuade, and control dialogue (keeping conversations pointed), all while also asking questions, summarizing, and identifying root-cause issues.

9. **7 steps of effective communications.** The seven steps range from offering advance warning through five progressive steps that conclude with an after-action review.

10. **Leadership attributes.** There are three types of attributes: technical (knowing what to do), executable (knowing how to do something), and interpersonal (the skills of working through and with others).

11. **Goals of business.** To make money and, at the same time, to make a difference.

12. **Key result areas.** People, quality, service, and cost.

Recipe for success

In 2016, Igloo was awarded a Skills Development Fund Grant from the Texas Workforce Commission. With the more than \$380,000 grant, we partnered with nearby Blinn College to develop an apprenticeship program (last year our Technical Apprenticeship Program was formally recognized with its inclusion in the National Apprenticeship System established by the U.S. Department of Labor), expanded custom training (identified through routine skill assessments and aligned with critical tasks, job roles, and functions), and upgraded the skills of both new and incumbent associates. Blinn College and the Texas Workforce Commission have been active and encouraging partners during our design and initial delivery phases.

Skill development and knowledge acquisition at Igloo begins with training as the starting point. We embrace accountability as a highly refined tool and personal management mechanism. Our recipe for associate success (discipline number 6) includes:

- **Training.** To address skill development needs, on-the-job training is most commonly employed based on a five-step training process.
- **Coaching.** Feedback, insight, and reward and recognition are all elements of a strong coaching approach. Gathering knowledge of how to continuously improve is a key result of supervisor-to-associate dialogue and peer-to-peer interactions.



OUR CULTURE-BUILDING GUIDELINES PROVIDE THE STANDARD TO WHICH WE EVALUATE AND HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE EVERY DAY.

- **Counseling.** Listening and lending a helping hand both support building initiative through willpower and inspiration. Like coaching, counseling is not restricted to reporting lines. Support for one another is a fundamental principle of our culture of commitment.
- **Accountability.** At Igloo, accountability is a tool and not the goal. Dialogue and debate increase, and advanced decision making leads to continuous improvement. Transparency and shared ownership support joint accountability as a way of working, and lead to greater outcomes.

Technical training

Technical expertise is critical to our manufacturing operation. The technical training journey that associates experience is based on neuroscience practices that support how adults learn best. The robust five-step training approach combines associate requirements with annual goal attainment and is complementary to other commitment-building disciplines. The five steps are:

1. **Demonstration.** Knowledgeable associates show learners how to do what is required.
2. **By the numbers.** Particularly with technical processes, there is a pre-established, step-by-step procedure that replicates best practices. Learners walk through a process or procedure from start to finish, shadowing exemplars.
3. **Role reversal.** Learners teach instructors, demonstrating their own prowess and mastery of material. We advocate teaching others as an important step in establishing personal knowledge acquisition.
4. **Practice with questions and answers.** Learners are given time to practice their newly acquired skills, allowing for clarifying questions to ensure that confidence is being built alongside skill development.
5. **Certification.** With all our carefully defined skills, metrics are established for productivity, efficiency, and safety levels. Learners are evaluated on the job for metric fulfillment before they are certified as competent and “floor ready.”
On-the-job trainers themselves walk

through this five-step process to achieve their own certification before they can train others. We monitor the same metrics that are used in training to increase proficiency on the factory floor.

Decision making

One of the first team lessons shared with new associates is how we prioritize and effectively make decisions (key result areas—discipline number 12). We advise that all human and financial capital decisions be made in the “PQSC” order:

1. People first and foremost, including operating safely and with respect to all.
2. Quality is how we roll; do the job right or don’t do it at all.
3. Service is not only a vehicle for responding to key stakeholders (associates, stakeholders, and customers), but it also is a commitment.
4. Cost is always a business fundamental. Having evaluated the first three key elements of decision making, financial cost controls always are considered.

We are reminded that, under stress, traditional priorities typically are addressed in just the opposite order, wherein cost control becomes number 1. Operating in a fiscally conservative manner is always prudent, but we want to consider all factors in appropriate depth and sequence. We believe that by starting with people, the subsequent three variables are well-attended.

A solid foundation

Igloo’s culture of commitment serves as the foundation for all we do. Neither mere words on posters, nor phrases recited during training, our culture-building guidelines provide the standard to which we evaluate and hold ourselves accountable every day. By embracing this standard, we’re “living the dream” as we build a culture committed to excellence through empowerment, continuous improvement, and discipline.

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